

PALESTINE AND THE DIALECTIC OF RACIAL CAPITALISM

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ABSTRACT

This article situates racial capitalism as a historical-theoretical framework to generate new and alternative theory on the question of Palestine. It argues that the genocidal assault on Gaza must be understood as the clearest expression of the logic of racial capitalism and the terrain upon which we must generate theory and strategy able to dismantle Zionism, colonialism and Imperialism. Many of the critiques of Zionism deploy frameworks of apartheid, understood by radicals in South Africa as a social structure reproduced by racial capitalism. It was understood that such a system could only be effectively dismantled through a national liberation project which understood race, class, capital and Imperialism as a single contradiction which must be overthrown as a totality. Similarly, earlier theorists within the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle, such as Fayeze Sayegh, understood Zionist settler colonialism as an outpost of Western Imperialism. By tracing the emergence of racial capitalism within the South African anti-apartheid struggle and the similarities between the white minority regime and Zionism, this article acts as a point of departure to drawing together histories of the Black radical tradition and the Palestinian struggle in crafting radical theory relevant for our present moment.

KEYWORDS: Racial capitalism, settler colonialism, national liberation, militarised accumulation, Imperialism, decolonisation

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Tens of thousands dead and maimed. Over half of Gaza destroyed. Schools and mosques in rubble, with the bodies of martyrs amongst them. Most of the Strip's population has been displaced, many now for the second or third times in their lives. As the bombs continue to fall on the people of Gaza and they persist to demonstrate the incomprehensible capacity of human beings to resist oppression, we must never forget that as we theorise, our inspiration derives from the people for whom we write. Their struggle for self-determination, freedom and dignity remains more than merely words or ideas, but the struggle for life itself.

Edward Said remarked that the word Palestine is a symbol for struggle against social injustice. In looking towards a future beyond the brutal degradation of human life and materials exhibited by European Imperialism, Said spoke of Palestine as having the function of 'both a place to be returned to and (of) an entirely new place ... perhaps even a historical disaster transformed into a hope for a different future' (Said 1979: 125). Somewhat similarly, Cedric Robinson ended *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* with a pronouncement that African peoples 'bridge the decline of one world order and the eruption of another', adding that 'it is not the province of one people to be the solution or the problem. But a civilization maddened by its own perverse assumptions and contradictions is loose in the world' (Robinson 2000: 306, 318). Zionism, the birth child of nineteenth century British Imperialism (Sayegh 2012), Aryan blood and soil racial nationalism (Masalha 2012), and self-aggrandising colonial visions of 'a land without a people for a people without a land' (Said 1979: 9), has been let loose upon Palestine and the region for far too long. While it is not the province of the Palestinians to reshape the world in their image, their historical circumstance has demanded of them the role of vanguard in facing down Zionist colonialism for over a century and has thus made them the unlikely inheritors of the Third World liberation struggle (Sayigh 2007: 176).

For us, the genocidal assault on Gaza symbolises the epitome of Imperialist barbarism, colonial savagery, and the destructive capacities of racial capitalism to lay waste an entire people for the sake of a diminishing material return. The conduct of capitalism in the disciplining of the humanity of Gaza as eradicable demonstrates more clearly than ever our collective duty to abolish a system that places the accumulation of capital and racial supremacist dreams of Zionist settlers above our collective humanity. Yet as the past and our present demonstrate, the most egregious injustices produced by racial capitalism seem destined to generate resistance to its abuses. The struggle for the liberation of Palestine remains one which connects our diverse struggles toward global revolutionary ends (Desai and Tabar 2017), beyond a civilisation where

‘they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe’ (Fanon 1963: 311). Where the unyielding defence of the worst excesses of Zionist colonial barbarism in Gaza has led to the inevitable situation where Europe and the U.S.A. are willing to burn the international order they built to the ground in defence of the crimes of Zionism (*Al Jazeera*, 2024a; Looker 2024). While fascism continues to surge across Europe and the systems of Western power continue to fragment in the face of their own racial, national and class contradictions, Palestine continues to sit at the heart of the dialectic between Imperialism and the struggles of those across the Third World which it seeks to keep out of the bounds of humanity.

As I sit writing this article, nine months into Israel’s genocidal assault on the people of Gaza, we continue to bear witness to the ongoing waves of international solidarity previously hard to imagine. From weekly mass protest movements in cities across the globe, direct action campaigns against the arms trade such as Palestine Action (Palestine Action n.d.), student encampments in universities around the world demanding boycotts and divestment (*Al Jazeera* 2024b), to the enforcement of sanctions on Israel through the capturing of Red Sea shipping by Ansar Allah (*Al Jazeera* 2024c) – the internationalisation of the Palestinian struggle joins the ongoing resistance of the Palestinian popular movement to Zionist genocidal colonialism (*Al Jazeera* 2023; Ajl 2024a; Ajl 2024b). From these occurrences we may surmise that Palestinians themselves and their struggle for self-determination continue to present us with a bridge into a world beyond the systemic violations of racial capitalism (Desai 2021; Hanieh 2024).

South Africa, Palestine and Racial Capitalism

Setting the tone for this special issue, this article outlines the importance of shifting our methodological and conceptual inventories towards the generation of new and radical social theory through the framework of racial capitalism in the analysis of the question of Palestine. Racial capitalism as a framework of historical-theoretical reconstruction was birthed in the context of the struggles of the African diaspora against slavery, jimCrow and neocolonialism, and the struggle against South African apartheid and Imperialism so as to better comprehend the material, ideological and historical intimacies between racial, colonial and capitalist social relations on a world-historical scale (Kelley 2021; Al-Balushi 2022; Levenson and Peret 2022). The intellectual genealogy of racial capitalism is most often cited with respect to the debates that emerged from the attempts to understand the social structure and

international placement of South African apartheid and the anti-systemic, nationalist and communist movements that theorised and confronted it (Alexander 2023a; Levenson and Peret 2023).

However, its more recent popularity has emerged from the recovery of previously marginalised theoretical traditions of the Black Atlantic, most specifically with regards to the project of historical reconstruction undertaken by Cedric Robinson (2000). A project that worked to generate what Yousuf Al-Balushi (2022) has termed a form of 'Black World Systems' analysis. For theorists such as Cedric Robinson, W.E.B. Du Bois and Oliver Cromwell Cox racial capitalism did not signify merely a specific regime of race and capital exhibited most clearly by the apartheid regime in South Africa, or the apartheid regime in the United States and its empire (Du Bois 1999: 50–52; Brown and Itzigsohn 2020). Rather, Robinson argues that the social and historical cauldron from which European capitalism emerged, buttressed by its imperial and genocidal acquisitions of lands and peoples of the South, was disciplined by the regimes of race, coloniality and nationalism:

The historical development of world capitalism was influenced in a most fundamental way by the particularistic forces of racism and nationalism. This could only be true if the social, psychological, and cultural origins of racism and nationalism both anticipated capitalism in time and formed a piece with those events that contributed directly to its organisation of production and exchange. (Robinson 2000: 9)

Never has the capitalist system, which should be understood as a historical process of accumulation on a world scale, been organised purely on the basis of the thrusts of a rationalistic economism that is indifferent to the materials, labourers, lands, politics and cultures which it expropriates and exploits (Robinson 1989: 189–190). The eurocentrism embedded in Western Marxism's account of the rise and reproduction of the capitalist system thus required reorientation in confronting the histories, theories and struggles of those of the periphery, the colonised, dispossessed 'backward' peoples of the world (Fanon 1963; Davis 2019; Acosta and Cajas-Guijarro 2022).

With regards to Palestine specifically, racial capitalism is a critically important theoretical framework due to the historical parallels between the South African and Zionist systems of apartheid, racialised exploitation, colonial dispossession and their geo-strategic roles as satellites of Imperialism. The system of racial segregation in South Africa was established by the Nationalist Party in 1948, the same year in which the Zionist movement with UN support established the State of Israel, enabled by the Nakba in Palestine (Erakat 2019: 52–54; Alexander 2023b). Both regimes were planted in the soil by European empires to function

as satellites for the geo-strategic interests of Imperialist accumulation and have sought to dominate their respective indigenous populations through various mechanisms of exploitation, domination and dispossession through racialised hierarchies, while dependent on international flows of financial, diplomatic and military support by Western powers (Clarino 2017: 3–4). This special issue builds upon theories which posit the centrality of racial capitalism to the socio-political structure of apartheid South Africa and the Imperialist system of accumulation on a world scale that sustained it.

Notably, while debates about the importance and usefulness of racial capitalism have rightly focused on the South African Apartheid regime and the Anti-Apartheid struggle, the contemporary struggle for decolonisation in Palestine has not yet engendered similar debates that necessitate the intersecting relations of settler colonialism, race, capital and Imperialism. However, such analysis is paramount in response to the colonial savagery of Zionist fascism seen in the Gaza strip as a response to Palestinian resistance and the growing international struggle to decolonise Palestine from the river to the sea (Desai 2021: 61–62; Toscano 2023). What has been erased in the post-1994 historical reconstruction of the South African struggle has been the military offensives carried out by the Apartheid regime in sites such as Angola, Mozambique and Namibia, as well as the erasure of the African national liberation forces that fought against it, ultimately leading to the demise of formal apartheid in 1994 (Horne 2019). This erasure is no accident of Western historiography. Such theoretical absence and historical mystification provide the epistemological and historical basis for this special issue, which seeks not only to situate Palestine as the contemporary terrain in which to generate critical theory with regards to racial capitalism within settler colonial contexts. But it also seeks to theorise Palestine as an internationalised terrain of struggle that necessitates the generation of new and alternative theories and methods that move beyond the strictures of orthodox critical theory in comprehending the question of Palestine and the Palestinian struggle for national self-determination, and the liberation of the material means of reproduction that is the land of Palestine and the historical necessity of decolonisation (Said 1979; Fanon 1963).

The reality that Zionism's war on Palestine did not begin on October 7 2023, but rather deep in the bowels of a capitalist world system organised by racialism, colonialism and Imperialism, continues to be the historical reckoning claimed by anti-systemic movements, scholars, activists and state-initiatives confronting Zionism's crimes on the international scene (*Middle East Eye* 2024). It is important to note that it was forty years prior to Patrick Wolfe's affirmation that colonial invasion sustains itself as a historical structure, as opposed to an event (Wolfe 2016), that Faye Sayegh (2012), writing in 1965 on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization

Research Center, declared that ‘the motto of the race-supremacist Zionist settler-regime in Palestine [is] racial elimination’. Race, a sociopolitical technology for the management and disciplining of humanity into full humans, not-quite humans, and nonhuman (Weheliye 2014: 3–5), appears in its most undisguised form in the colonial world (Fanon 1963: 39–40). Amongst its diverse strategies of colonial expansion, Zionism needs race both as an organising principle for the society it seeks to build, and as an ideology which can legitimate the dehumanisation, exploitation, dispossession and murder of those it seeks to supplant (Wolfe 2016; Lentin, 2018: 108).

Sayegh understood that the social cauldron from which Zionism emerged directed its trajectory as a regime planted in the Arab region for the purpose of fulfilling Imperialist designs, was to be governed by a racial logic of ‘self-segregation’, that disciplined the humanity of the colonised Palestinians as expungeable in the creation of a Jewish state (Sayegh 2012: 215–216). Far from being a more recent development of the Israeli right, or the Netenyahus of this world, the Zionist state was premised upon ideals of racial nationalist supremacy from its outset:

Racism is not an acquired trait of the Zionist settler-state. Nor is it an accidental, passing feature of the Israeli scene. It is congenial, essential and permanent. For it is inherent in the very ideology of Zionism and in the basic motivation for Zionist colonisation and statehood. (Sayegh 2012: 214)

The complex structure of Israeli apartheid, underpinned by settler frontierism, military occupation and colonial counterinsurgency, thus constitutes the social, legal and political expression of Zionism as a regime committed to the expulsion of the Indigenous Palestinians in favour of a racial state whose *raison d’être* is maintaining ‘part of a wall of defence for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilisation against Barbarism’ (Masalha 2012: 37). Today, Israel continues to serve the function of an Imperial vanguard, of which its *modus operandi* as a settler colony, a social formation rooted in militarised white supremacist settler acquisition (Horne 2018) provides it with a diverse set of strategies to pacify Palestinian and regional opposition (Ajl 2024c). Through its commitment to Imperialist wars of encroachment and ‘anti-terror’ counterinsurgency campaigns in its suppression of popular nationalist movements, Israel operates as the twenty-first century frontier colonial laboratory par excellence (Loewenstein 2023), through marketing its colonial occupation as a reproducible model for the current wave of fascist nationalisms sweeping the world (Turner forthcoming), warehousing border projects for the disposed and redundant refugee and surplus populations of the South (Walia 2021: 80), and domestic social pacification models that

define contemporary neo-liberal racial capitalism (Halper 2015; Lloyd and Wolfe 2016: 115; Ajl 2024c).

Yet this role of the Zionist state as a satellite of Western Imperialism in upholding capitalist (and militarised) accumulation on a regional and world-scale exists on the margins of many theorisations of Palestine. Indeed, the long history of Israel's role in world-wide counterinsurgency projects in Guatemala, Chile, Argentina, Angola and South Africa continues to be marginal to understandings of Zionism's role as a vanguard of American empire (Ajl 2023; Ayyash this volume). The genocidal assault in Gaza, that Israeli politicians have repeatedly said was their 'second Nakba' (*Middle East Monitor* 2023), may be understood as the inevitable continuum of the seventeen-year siege of the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian resistance, the fifty-seven years of settler-colonial military occupation, and the seventy-six years of colonial dispossession. But the logic that drives Zionist colonial statecraft under the auspices of first the British, now the American empire, can be firmly located within the historical system of racial capitalism, of which settler colonialism is a uniquely viable model for preserving capitalist property relations in the face of local and regional threats from the hostile indigenous (Lloyd and Wolfe 2016: 116; Horne 2018).

With this in mind, it should be remembered that it was in the midst of the South African anti-apartheid struggle that the Manifesto of the Azanian People, published by Action Youth and adopted by the National Forum in 1983, declared that the struggle for national liberation in South Africa was committed against the system of racial capitalism (South African History Online 1984). This came to be articulated by South African revolutionary Neville Alexander as a strategy whereby:

The immediate goal of the national liberation struggle now being waged in South Africa is the destruction of the system of racial capitalism. Apartheid is simply a particular socio-political expression of this system. Our opposition to apartheid is therefore only a starting point for our struggle against the structures and interests which are the real basis of apartheid. (Alexander 2023a)

Apartheid and settler colonialism in South Africa came to be theorised within the framework of racial capitalism, whereby the white minority regime functioned as a settler colonial outpost of Imperialism for the benefit of a minority of white settlers and international financial capital (Hemson and Legassick 1973; Levenson and Paret 2023a: 2409). However, apartheid and settler colonialism in Palestine continues to be plagued by methodological nationalism, if not historical exceptionalism (Barakat 2018: 360–361; Desai 2021: 55; Ajl 2023: 2). The result has led to a situation whereby the utility of racial capitalism and its importance for

theory and strategy within the South African Anti-Apartheid movement has been marginalised in the case of the Palestinian struggle. This is despite the fact that the international solidarity campaign premised upon the strategy of the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions Movement inspired by the South African struggle, focuses directly on the intimacy of military, commercial and financial chains which reproduce patterns of exploitation and accumulation from the colonisation and occupation of Palestine (Palestinian Civil Society 2005).

Most critiques of Israeli apartheid, including those deployed by the BDS Movement (BNC n.d.) rely on the international law definition of apartheid as a system of exclusively legalised racial domination (Clarno and Eid 2017: 6). However, this excludes the very reasons that the structures of racial domination and exploitation exist in the first place. These reasons are the intent to eliminate the Palestinian people from Palestine in bolstering a Jewish state that acts as a vanguard of Imperialism in the region through the capturing of newly dispossessed lands and converting them into property (Englert 2020); the exploitation of Palestinian lives and labour in marketing a colonial counterinsurgency laboratory (Turner, Forthcoming); and the de-development of the Arab region for the purposes of continued Imperialist exploitation (Kadri 2015: 4; Ajl, 2024a: 64). As Gerald Horne (2019: 102) elucidated, the original blueprint of Apartheid in South Africa can be understood as an 'anti-poverty programme for whites' that worked to buttress the emerging indigenous class struggle and national liberation projects, while the state operated further afield as a satellite for Imperialism in the region. South Africa under Apartheid worked to ensure the smooth extraction of land, labour and resources across central and Southern Africa by international capital in the face of decolonisation and national liberation movements by working with the United States to deny economic and political independence and industrial development through assassinations, invasions and stoking disastrous and bloody civil wars (Horne 2019; Podur 2020). In other words, apartheid as a system of racial exploitation was maintained in order to serve the needs of capital and the geo-strategic interests of Western Imperialism and South African settler colonialism (Levenson and Paret 2023: 3404).

In their attempt to counter such omissions with regards to Palestine, Andy Clarno and Haidar Eid began the task of theorising the Zionist system of apartheid and colonial military occupation as the social and political expressions of the system of racial capitalism within our current moment:

Overall, therefore, neoliberalism coupled with Israel's settler colonial project has transformed the Palestinians into a disposable population. This has

enabled Israel to carry out its project of concentration and colonization. Understanding the neoliberal dynamics of Israel's settler-colonial regime can contribute to the development of strategies to challenge Israeli apartheid not only as a system of racial domination but as a regime of racial capitalism. (Clarno and Eid 2007: 10)

It is worth noting that the project of bringing the framework of racial capitalism into the centre of an analysis of Palestine is not merely for theoretical expediency. But rather, understanding the intimate relationship between racial regimes, settler colonialism, military occupation, racialised class structures, Imperial acquisition and capital accumulation allows for the generation of strategies that may challenge the Zionist entity and the world-system that reinforces it (Desai and Tabar 2017: vii-viii). The current genocidal assault on Gaza is itself the material-historical outcome of the twinned logics of Zionist settler colonial racial eliminationism, committed to containing the maximum number of Palestinians on a minimum amount of land (Ajl 2024b: 6), and the trajectory of Zionist racial capitalism to literally waste warehoused surplus Palestinian labour through war, assassination, famine, and exposure to premature death for the needs of accumulation (Kadri 2023: 1–2).

The understanding of South African Apartheid and Imperialism and the recognition of alternative conceptions and histories of capitalism from the perspective of the African diaspora (Robinson 2000; Alexander 2023a; Levenson and Paret 2023a) necessitated the generation of new and alternative theory distinct from Marxist orthodoxy with regards to the structure and scope of capitalism as a global system. Racial capitalism emerged from an alternative terrain of theory and struggle amongst the clearest expressions of white, colonial, ruling class depravity and the anti-colonial, anti-racist, third world-national liberation movements that resisted them. It is no wonder it gained theoretical and strategic force within the struggle against the white supremacist South African apartheid regime and has today become repopularised in the centre of white supremacist capitalist empire (Kelley 2021; Levenson and Paret 2023b). It is now time for its theoretical purchase, analytical currency and strategic utility to be deployed in confronting Zionist settler colonialism as a bulwark of Imperialism.

Genocide as Accumulation

As argued above, the genocidal war on Gaza is not an exception or suspension of the norms of Zionist settler colonial capitalism. But it rather exhibits a renewed round of the colonial counterinsurgency strategy of 'mowing the lawn' (Eid 2023), the necropolitical racial eliminationist model of intentional destruction, de-development and

depopulation (Mbembe 2019: 44), and the capitalist cycle of reproduction by waste (Kadri 2023: 272). By waste I mean the literal discarding, murder, exposing to premature death of Palestinian living labour for the reproduction of settler capitalist patterns of accumulation. If, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007: 28) argues, race must be understood as a political technology which produces 'the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death', then the process described by Ali Kadri (2023: 1) whereby 'imperialist war, the purest form of waste' constituting a 'value forming activity whose saleable product is the premature death of labour', expresses the genocide in Gaza, the literal extermination of contained and redundant Palestinian life, as the racial valorisation of capital par excellence.

Contrary to orthodox critical theories of capitalism which posit the potential of all living labour as necessary and useful for the needs of accumulation, even as surplus, the exploitation, redundancy and liquidation through practices of waste, war and dispossession of labour within settler colonial contexts exhibit the reproduction of the logic of racial capitalism in its most genocidal expression. Indeed, the dialectic of accumulation on a world scale exhibits its logic most clearly at the margins of 'formal' capitalist exploitation, in the periphery as opposed to its centre (Robinson 2000: 164). This logic requires the political technology of race as the defining organising principle of the colonial order, that fashions the lives of the colonised into variegated levels of exploitability either through the exploitation of their labour in newly constructed settlements, their warehousing in ghettos, bantustans and concentration camps, or their physical annihilation (Bhattacharyya 2018: 17–19).

Placing these processes in historical context, Nahla Abdo (2024: 95) argues that from the 1948 Nakba to the 1967 Naksa (and up to the ongoing Nakba in Gaza today), the long *durée* of Zionist settler colonialism consists of one continuous structure of eliminatory genocide against the Palestinians, containing within it peaks of intermittent massacres. These genocidal massacres must not be understood as contrary to the logic of racial capital accumulation as much as the dispossession of Palestinian labour in the West Bank and Gaza are to the needs of Zionist settler colonial capitalism. Indeed, Palestinian labour has fulfilled the particular needs of settler capitalism with each restructuring of global patterns of accumulation, within the long-term aim of their eventual elimination altogether (Abdo and Yuval-Davis 1995). These peaks of extreme colonial warfare and violence exhibit renewed rounds of the reproduction of colonial capitalist accumulation through wasted nature and humanity which 'scaffold capital's metabolic order' (Kadri 2023: 272). Racial capitalism is thus exhibited in its most natural state in Palestine, where its logical endpoint is genocidal fascism (Myers 2023: 155; Toscano, 2023).

Race, capital and settler colonialism have operated co-constitutively in Palestine from the very beginnings of the Zionist settlement, with specific reference to the ideals of a racially-exclusive nationalism (Wolfe 2016). As Abdo and Nira Yuval-Davis detail, the dynamics of the Zionist political economy in Palestine prior to the establishment of the state of Israel through the Nakba can be summed up in the three slogans of Labour Zionism: '*Kibbush Ha'adamah* (the conquest of the land), *Kibbush Ha'avoda* (the conquest of labour), and *Tōzeret Ha'aretz* (the conquest of the market)' (Abdo and Yuval-Davis 1995: 297). The Zionist aims were territoriality—the expansion and consolidation of exclusively Jewish settlements in Palestine, and the creation and development of a Jewish-only labour force and Jewish-only economy. These racial regimes of labour, territorial acquisition and accumulation prevented cheaper Indigenous Palestinian labour from undermining the developing capitalist-agricultural economy of the Zionist settlers, as well as making sure the settler economy did not become dependent upon native labour which would eventually have to be removed from Palestine in the founding of a Jewish state (Abdo and Yuval-Davis 1995: 300–301). Like many other settler colonies (Coulthard 2014; Clarno 2017), the development of Zionist capitalism was premised upon the dual processes of Indigenous dispossession and a racially exclusive labour force. As Abdo details:

Indigenous Palestinians, it has been shown, were placed under double subordination; the advent of capitalism and the consequent ruination of their 'natural' economy, resulting in their expropriation from their lands; and, through Zionist racist-nationalistic policies they were prevented from having access to their land even as wage labourers. Contradictory as this relationship of exploitation/exclusion might appear, it was this precise relationship which characterised the Zionist colonial movement in Palestine. (Abdo 1991: 82)

In the post-Nakba period, the trajectories of settler colonialism and racial capitalism continued to follow the dual articulation of exploitation and exclusion of the Palestinian majority, in turn affecting the nature of the Israeli racial class structure. After the successful acquisition of land through colonial wars of expansion in 1948 and 1967 (Khalidi 2020), and the expropriation of property dispossessed of its Palestinian inhabitants through absentees' property laws (Lentin 2018: 34–35, see also Lentin in this volume), the complex system of apartheid over Palestine structured the patterns of accumulation that would serve the longevity of the Zionist state and pacify its domestic racialised class structure. Indeed, settler capitalism maintains a struggle over how best to distribute and organise colonial robbery and land theft (Englert 2020). While the current genocidal assault on Gaza and the ongoing structure of elimination and dispossession in the West Bank and the Naqab must be understood

through the long continuum of settler colonial genocide (Tatour 2021; Abdo 2024), racial capitalism organises the structure of Zionist apartheid and colonialism in the interests of Imperialism as an outpost buttressing accumulation on a world scale. The nature and trajectory of Zionist settler colonialism today can thus only be understood in the historical context of a capitalist system organised upon the basis of race, coloniality and Imperialism.

However, as Gargi Bhattacharyya insists, there is no one guiding logic that determines colonial statecraft in meeting the demands of elimination and/or accumulation in all historical conjunctures:

Better by far to think of capitalism as highly differentiated and opportunistic in its formations. Local histories and conflicts, unexpected alliances and accidents of geography all contribute to a highly variegated 'global capitalism'. (Bhattacharyya 2018: 19)

Instead of abiding by a unitary guiding logic, specific historical regimes of race and capital should be understood as operating co-constitutively within specific conditions to fit the needs of the social and historical moment and to correspond with new needs and new opportunities (Robinson 1989: 190). The 1948 Nakba met two of the requirements for the construction of a Zionist state: the genocidal dispossession of eighty per cent of the Indigenous Palestinians to make way for Jewish settlers (Erakat 2019: 73), and the primitive accumulation of capital from the acquisition of Palestinian land and property to finance the incoming settlers and the state bureaucracy (Englert 2020: 1657; Raz 2024). Likewise, the genocidal Nakba in Gaza today is the result of a number of more recent historical trajectories. The first is a result of global shifts to capitalist organisation towards neoliberalism: the counter-revolution against Northern labour gains and Southern industrial development in favour of privatisation of publicly owned institutions, deregulation of international markets and 'structural adjustment' assaults on any economic independence in the South through attacks on welfare, environmental regulations, domestic tariffs, labour organisation and social development (Hickel 2018; Dorninger et al 2022, 9). The second is the result of the way in which the Zionist state has organised itself in response to the variegated forms taken by the Palestinian resistance, in the West Bank and Gaza respectively (see e.g., Allday and Omar 2024). In Palestine these two specific historical trajectories are interrelated.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the Oslo Accords in 1993 occurred within the Zionist state's shift to a neoliberal settler capitalist economy (Clarno 2017: 13–14). This consisted of a process whereby the reliance on cheap Palestinian labour from Gaza and the West Bank under direct military control was becoming more redundant to the

needs of Zionist settler capitalism. This occurred alongside the strategy of implementing designs for a 'two-state' model in Palestine as a strategy of long-term counterinsurgency to undermine the Palestinian popular movement that had emerged from the First Intifada (Tabar 2017: 419). As detailed by Clarno:

Whereas Israel previously sought to incorporate 1967 Palestinians into the Israeli labour market, the state now treats jobs in Israel as a privilege for good behaviour. The availability of work permits depends on individual and collective subservience; not only does Israel restrict the number of permits during an uprising but individuals with marks on their security record are automatically blacklisted. The state also adjusts the number of permits to address the changing demands of Israeli employers in agriculture and construction. In general terms, restrictions tightened from 1993 to 1996, abated from 1997 to 1999, intensified again after 2000, and bifurcated after 2006 when Israel began increasing the number of permits for the West Bank and eliminated permits altogether for the Gaza Strip. (Clarno 2017: 40)

With these shifts the Zionist state could achieve two goals with one stroke. The suspension of work permits from Gaza, the 'disengagement' from the Strip and the evacuation of Jewish settlers in 2005 and the beginning of the siege of Gaza in 2007 fulfil both: first, dispensing with the need for racialised Palestinian agricultural and construction labour in Israel, a need filled by racialised immigrant labour from further afield (Clarno 2017: 39). And second, achieving the goal of Zionist settler colonial elimination by containing the maximum number of Palestinians on a minimum amount of land in a state of siege where the conditions of life can be maintained at just below levels of social reproduction (Oxfam 2024). Notably, these shifts were a direct result of the organic movement of mass resistance seen in the First and Second Intifadas and the growing militant resistance in Gaza against the continued occupation, leading to the election of Hamas in 2006. Despite the counterinsurgency operation against the First Intifada that led to the Oslo Accords and the acquiescence of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank in subservience to Israeli economic, military and security structures, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were not willing to play the silent natives role and to disappear quietly into ever receding concentration camps and ghettos. It was thus in the face of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist resistance that Zionist racial capitalism and settler colonialism reformulated towards the trajectories we see today. We can see evidence of this most clearly in the necropolitical form taken by Zionist settler accumulation in Gaza where Israeli settler capitalism benefits from the amputation of lives via genocidal war, lessening the quantity of use values required for the reproduction of contained and repressed Palestinian labour (Ajl 2024a: 72).

It is in the context of confronting the challenge of Palestinian resistance to continued colonisation that the restructuring of Israeli settler capitalism as a hi-tech securocratic war economy has taken place. This restructuring is one in which the wastage of Palestinian living labour in Gaza has become a marketable commodity through militarised accumulation (Halper 2015: 4–5; Turner, forthcoming). It is no wonder that Israel has marketed its ‘field tested’ counterinsurgency models and arms industry upon confrontation with the most organised form of Palestinian anti-colonial armed resistance on the ground by Hamas (Ajl 2024a). The global rise of Elbit Systems, the Zionist state’s largest private arms manufacturer which boasts its ‘field-tested’ weaponry which it markets internationally (Dowling 2023), attests to the intimate relationship between contemporary forms of settler colonial warfare and the expanding global securocratic war economy upon which racial capitalism continues to devastate popular resistance (Scheer 2024). In fact, the Israeli arms industry has continued to claim record profits even in the course of this recent genocidal massacre (Reuters 2024), exhibiting the increasing reliance of racial capitalism upon militarised accumulation (Robinson 2020).

In Palestine ‘mowing the lawn’ – the term used by Israel for periodic military assaults against the Gaza Strip – not only acts as capital’s pressure valve, but is itself a constitutive part of processes of global militarised accumulation in which Israel has thrived as a living laboratory for military, security and counterinsurgency technologies (Lowenstein 2023) against the backdrop of combating an organised and effective anti-colonial struggle. Gaza is thus the clearest expression that not only does capital come into this world dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt (Marx 1887: 536), but that it is reproduced in this world through the value-added instruments of race, colonial war making and death. Zionist settler colonialism and apartheid constitute the clearest embodiment of the logics of racial capitalism. As Max Ajl (2023) articulates:

Israel, pound for pound, is the best investment the US has ever made. Israel is the purest expression of Western power, combining militarism, imperialism, settler colonialism, counterinsurgency, occupation, racism, instilling ideological defeat, huge profitable war-making and hi-tech development into a manticore of destruction, death, and mayhem.

The Zionist state’s primary role should be understood as a lynchpin of Imperialism demonstrating the necessity of unyielding support for Zionism by the architects of Western power in the pursuit of geo-political dominance and accumulation. Yet the Palestinian resistance continues to confront these trajectories, stunting the ability of Zionist

settler colonialism to reproduce itself through the quiet acquiescence with racial elimination. The Palestinian movement for liberation threatens the entire system of racial capitalism and marks itself at the centre of the critical dialectic between Imperialism and world revolution.

Decolonisation and Racial Capitalism

The force of racial capitalism as a theoretical framework in the South African struggle was its ability to cut through the ideological distortions that apartheid as a material system enforced upon the colonised. Racial capitalism allowed South African revolutionaries and those within the global solidarity movement to reorientate theory away from the eurocentric conceits of Western Marxism that could not comprehend the interplay of race, class and colonialism in a single social formation. Instead, the analysis of racial capitalism provided scope for South African revolutionaries to evaluate the system of colonial apartheid as a single social structure of exploitation that required total destruction:

The central argument of RC [racial capitalism] is that the class and national aspects cannot be separated ... [R]ace and class are intertwined and ... constitute one problem or contradiction. In other words, 'apartheid' and 'capitalism' do not represent two contradictions, but a single one i.e. racial capitalism ... At the level of strategy, RC means the rejection of the 'two-stage theory' and the acceptance of the 'one-stage theory' ... [For proponents of RC], national liberation means the immediate destruction of racial capitalism and the construction of socialism. (Levenson and Peret 2023: 3403)

In realising theory as a weapon in the struggle for decolonisation, anti-imperialism and socialism (Cabral 1966), racial capitalism allows us to analyse clearly the local, regional and global elements which constitute the ongoing invasion of Palestine for the benefit of Imperialist accumulation and to work towards generating effective strategies with which to challenge them. Despite the lack of attention to racial capitalism as an analytic framework within the Palestinian BDS Movement, the strategy of boycott, divestment and sanctions in the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement came to be influenced by the diverse theorisations of racial capitalism in pressuring international investors, multinational companies, trade unions, public institutions and eventually governments to suspend affiliations with South Africa (Hemson and Legassick 1976). In the current international solidarity struggle, it is more important than ever for us to reject the methodological nationalism that plagues many analyses of Palestine, particularly amongst 'settler colonial studies' scholars (Desai 2021: 10; Ajl 2023). Suspending Palestine in space and time from the global intersections of race, Imperialism, capital and militarisation

that sustain colonisation, as well as the solidarities that have always been characterised by internationalist resistance, impedes our ability to generate strategies which can concretely challenge racial capitalism from our respective sites of struggle.

Yet in drawing from the history of the South African struggle we must also come to terms with the failure of reconciliation and compromise with the apartheid regime which the Palestinian national bourgeoisie (represented by the Palestinian Authority) and the leaders of the BDS Movement (BNC) are committed to repeating (Clarno and Eid 2017: 6; Ajl 2024b: 23). Addressing Israeli apartheid simply as a system of social, legal and political domination will necessarily result in a fractured social movement that is unable to address the material basis of apartheid, that is racial capitalism. With the Oslo period well and truly ground into the rubble of Gaza, it is time for us to understand the Palestinian national liberation movement as one that can only be created by the Palestinian popular classes and not the technocratic negotiations of a comprador class unwilling to commit themselves to the struggle for the total liberation of Palestine from apartheid, colonialism and racial capitalism. As Alexander proclaimed:

We have seen that the national bourgeoisie have failed to complete the democratic revolution. The middle classes cannot be consistent since their interests are, generally speaking and in their own consciousness, tied to the capitalist system. Hence only the Black working class can take the task of completing the democratisation of the country on its shoulders . . . The class struggle against capitalist exploitation and the national struggle against racial oppression become one struggle under the general command of the Black working class and its organisations. Class, colour, and nation converge in the National Liberation Movement. (Alexander 2023a)

Racial capitalism sustains a framework which illuminates the totality of class, race, colonialism and Imperialism in a single system of exploitation sustaining accumulation on a world-historical scale. Because of this, there can be no effective model of struggle which attempts to deal with apartheid, settler colonialism, and material inequality as separate social phenomena. Rather, the Palestinian national liberation movement must converge to confront all systems of oppression and exploitation in its struggle against Zionism and Imperialism. What an analysis of racial capitalism reveals for the current struggle is how colonial technologies of violence, modes of governance, regimes of race and strategies of social pacification are shared and exported across geographies and how they can be resisted (Desai and Tabar 2017: ix). Palestine signifies the critical dialectic of the confrontation between popular movements for liberation and racial capitalism, symbolising the struggles against military occupation,

colonialism, racism and the struggles for land and dignity the world over. As Ghassan Kanfani declared:

Imperialism has laid its body over the world, the head in Eastern Asia, the heart in the Middle East, its arteries reaching Africa and Latin America. Wherever you strike it, you damage it, and you serve the world revolution. (Brehony 2017)

To return to Cedric Robinson, what the study of racial capitalism and the forms of resistance to it reveal is that liberation had emerged most forcefully from the most unlikely of oppositions. It was not the unified industrial proletariat of the developed metropolitan core that would pose the greatest threat to racial capitalism and Imperialism, but rather those who had been forced for centuries to confront its most undignified horrors. The struggles for self-determination in the periphery of the capitalist world system were just as important, if not more so, as the organisation of wage-workers in the West. A vision of the world beyond the violations of racial capitalism had in fact been constructed far from the region which Marx predicted would bring about proletarian revolution. Instead, the reality, as Robinson saw it, would be far simpler:

The critique of the capitalist world system acquired determinant force not from movements of industrial workers in the metropolises but from those of the 'backward' peoples of the world. (Robinson 2000: 317)

Racial capitalism allows for a more comprehensive view of the form and structure of Zionist settler colonialism and the global role it plays as a satellite of Imperialism. Race cannot be understood merely as the ideological justification for the exploitation and dispossession of the Palestinians, but rather constitutes the organising principle of settler capitalist societies and the Zionist entity. Just as South Africa was the terrain of struggle upon which the theory of racial capitalism gained momentum as a material force in the confrontation between socialist Black liberation and white supremacist capitalism, Palestine today represents the terrain of struggle for anti-racists, socialists and anti-imperialists upon which racial capitalism must be theorised, comprehend and dismantled.

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